"Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose." What life gives to society, literature gives back to life. It is a representation of our thoughts, words, actions and feelings and much beyond our simple interpretation of it. Literature never was and can never be separated from our experiences of living. It gives us an identity other than our existing self. Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. When we talk of identity we can not escape identity that is made and shaped by our culture, the Cultural identity that is constituted, refined and chiseled by literature. It can be defined in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. Histories have come from somewhere. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essential past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Culture is always in a state of flux and so is our
identity. It changes from place to place and the same culture has a varying effect on a similar group of people when they move from one place to another. This is where the diaspora effect comes in. Diaspora communities represent and maintain a culture different from those of the countries in which they are born, often retaining strong ties with their country and culture of origin and with other communities of the same origin in order to preserve that culture.

This is an essentially cultural and not a biological phenomenon. Jhumpa Lahiri, the author of *Namesake* is truly a deft Diasporic writer. Faithful to her Bengali roots, she writes *Namesake* from the eye of a Bengali and in the language of an NRI. It captures the feeling, anxiety, helplessness and the bonding that one experiences while living away from one’s homeland. It makes a profound mark on our identity, reshapes many of our old beliefs and customs and keeps our heart strongly rooted to the homeland. As we flip through the pages of the book we realize that the author speaks through the protagonist and we connect with him. While in the movie ‘The Namesake’, the camera is the eye and through that eye we connect with the actors. Both, the movie and the book are a joyful experience to witness and both speak volumes of the excellent craftsmanship shown by the two women.

**About the Author**

Daughter of a Bengali immigrant, the Pulitzer Prize winning author Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London and later moved to United States. Therefore she
considers herself as American. She recalls that in her earlier years in school, she used to be called by her pet name as her teachers found it easy to pronounce ‘Jhumpa’ rather than her formal names. In this context she says "I always felt so embarrassed by my name.... You feel like you're causing someone pain just by being who you are".4

This ambivalence over her unusual name and identity are the inspiration for the ambivalence of Gogol the protagonist in her novel The Namesake. As a child her mother made sure that she learnt Bengali traditions and customs well and they often used to visit their relatives in Kolkata. This is one reason why she is able to narrate the lives and incidents of the people staying abroad and back home so beautifully. She is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Pulitzer Prize for her debut collection of short stories, Interpreter of Maladies, the PEN/Hemingway Award and The New Yorker Debut of the Year. Her novel The Namesake was a New York Times Notable Book, a Los Angeles Times Book Prize finalist and was selected as one of the best books of the year by USA Today and Entertainment Weekly5.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s writings are autobiographical in nature and her style of writing is simple. It focuses on characters that oscillate between their native cultural values and the adopted values of their new homes. She examines the struggles, anxieties and biases of her characters that she draws from her parents, friends and relatives. She beautifully and authentically portrays the innermost recesses
and pangs shared by diaspora. *Interpreter of Maladies* as well as her first novel *The Namesake* talks of the related crisis of dual identity and various hazards experienced by them in the process of settlement in the new country, their cultural dilemmas and displacement, their identity crisis and eventually their emergence as better and sorted individuals.

**About the Director**

Mira Nair, a Punjabi and a Malayali filmmaker, producer was born in Rourkela, Orissa on 15th October 1957. She presently resides in New York and owns a production company named Mirabai Films. Her debut film feature film, Salaam Bombay won the Golden Camera award at the Cannes Film Festival and also earned a nomination for Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. The 1991 film Mississippi Masala starred Denzel Washington and Sarita Choudhury, and profiled a family of displaced Ugandan-Indians living and working in Mississippi. She was also the director of the movie *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love*, a provocative movie set in 16th century India. In 1998 she made *My Own Country* starring Naveen Andrews *Monsoon Wedding*, a story about a chaotic Punjabi wedding was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion award at the Venice film festival. Her biographical film *Amelia* was released in October 2009 to predominantly negative reviews. In her most personal film to date, Mira Nair brings to the screen a poignant and transporting version of Jhumpa Lahiri’s best-selling novel *The Namesake*. The movie also entitled *The Namesake* premiered in
2006 where Nair was presented with the Dartmouth award. She often works with long time creative collaborator, screenwriter Sooni Taraporevala, whom she met at Harvard. She is presently a member of the A-List of directors in Hollywood.

Her movies are both, personal and powerful. She is able to bring out the magnetism in her characters, makes them sway between family ties and personal self and artistically bring about their self-realization and eventually self-evolution. Much different from the masala Bollywood film makers, her strongest and central characters generally turn out to be women, women in their different roles, be it a mother in Namesake, a daughter in Monsoon Wedding or be it a courtesan in Kama Sutra. She happens to be a part of the artistic yet entertaining bunch of film makers.

**Script v/s Screen**

The New York Times aptly describes *The Namesake* as “A debut novel that is as assured and eloquent as the work of a long time master of the craft.” It is easy to mistake Lahiri’s style of recording minor everyday observations for just another novel employing exotic Indian-American backdrops to peddle ordinary storylines. But nothing could be farther from the truth. She has a keen sense of what makes her characters and their dilemmas unique, and an extraordinary talent for empathy.
Ashima Ganguli, the pregnant wife wrestles with an intense longing to be with her family and to share the experience of childbirth with her mother and father. Ashima’s husband, Ashoke, meanwhile, wants to provide a better life for his new son by earning a doctorate degree from a prestigious American university. The novel thus opens on a diverging note. Two people, married, living together yet wanting a different way of life. They are on the heels of their arranged marriage, trying their best to settle in an alien land called America and living everyday through the transformation from an Indian way of living to the everyday American living style. In a nutshell, the experience of ‘foreign-ness’ This experience rather affects the two individuals in different manners, where on one hand we find Ashoke settling to the new world with ease, on the other we have Ashima who resists ‘Americanization’ and longs for her family and traditions all the time. She stays in America, eventually adapts to it, even makes friends but is grounded to her deep rooted Bengali culture.

While both characters want to build a better life in America, however, their pasts play a strong role in who they are and what they will become. The Ganguli couple move to Cambridge, Massachusetts after their arranged marriage. The book carries us through their difficult transformation from Indian way of living into the everyday American lifestyle. The differences in thoughts, variance in ideologies, experience of foreign-ness. The family is torn between the old family traditions and adapting to the new American way of
life. The husband adapts much better than his wife does. The refuses and resists everything American and longs for her family.

It should not be mistaken to be just a novel that focuses on people who face cultural displacements or the Diaspora dilemma. It is also a story about Gogol, a child born to Ashima and Ashoke who was named unusually by his father as the hospital authorities would not let them leave until they had officially assigned an identity to their son. Ashoke suggests the name of Gogol for two reasons. First, it is the name of his favourite author, the famous Nicolai Gogol. The second reason is that Ashoke, before he was married, had met with a very serious accident. The train he was riding in had derailed. Many people died. Ashoke had broken his back and could not move. He had been reading Gogol just before the accident and had a page of that book clutched in his hand. The paper caught the attention of the medics who had come to rescue him. The page that acted as a flag saved his life and thus he owed his life to Gogol. Named for a Russian writer by his Indian parents in memory of a catastrophe years before, Gogol Ganguli knows only that he suffers the burden of his heritage as well as his odd, antic name.

"Did you guys know all this stuff when you named me after him?" "How could you guys name me after someone so strange? No one takes me seriously," Gogol said. (Namesake pg 100) The fondness that he has for his name until Elementary level changes into irritation and hatred till the time he reaches
college. Before heading for college he officially changes his name to Nikhil despite his father's dislike for it. "Here the children decide," Ashoke laments. "We live in a country with a president named Jimmy. There is nothing we can do ")(pg 77). Jhumpa Lahiri empathises with 'Gogol' and reveals the defining power of names and also the expectations that are bestowed upon us by our parents and how at times we struggle for our identity. As the novel progresses we find 'Gogol' emerging as a passive character who does not have a single friend and therefore his relationships with his lovers become the centre of his life. This may be why he is such a sad, almost pathetic character. As a young man, Gogol no, call him Nikhil, or better still, just plain Nick-can't believe his parents named him after some Ukrainian writer. He wants to be American, dates American girls, tries cigarettes and marijuana and makes desperate efforts to be recognized as an American. One day when Gogol is late coming from Yale because of a train accident, his father tells him the truth of him being named so. It has a profound effect on him "And when Gogol demands tearfully to know why he has not been told the story before, we have the following exchange: "It happened so long ago. I didn't want to upset you. "It doesn't matter. You should have told me. ""Perhaps, his father concedes, glancing briefly in Gogol's direction. He removes the keys from the ignition. 'Come, you must be hungry. The car is getting cold". But Gogol doesn't move. He sits there, still struggling to absorb the information, feeling awkward, oddly ashamed, at fault. "I'm sorry, Baba."And suddenly the sound of his pet name, uttered by his father as he has been accustomed to hearing it all his life, means
something completely new, bound up with a catastrophe he has unwittingly embodied for years. "Is that what you think of when you think of me?" Gogol asks him. "Not at all," his father says eventually, one hand going to his ribs, a habitual gesture that has boggled Gogol until now. 'You remind me of everything that followed.' (pg.124)

Gogol graduates in architecture and starts living in New York and gets into a relationship with Maxine Ratliff. Ashima thinks of her son's affair as casual and believes that he would soon get over it. Ashima is alone at home surrounded by the security system installed by Ashoke who goes to Ohio on a short term project. One day Ashima receives a call from Ashoke that he is in the hospital for an ordinary check up. Later the hospital informs her that her husband has expired. Sonia, their daughter flies back from San Francisco to be with Ashima. Gogol goes alone to Cleveland to cremate his father. "He is terrified to see his mother, more than he has been to see his father's body in the morgue. He knows now the guilt that his parents carried inside, at being able to do nothing when their parents had died in India, of arriving weeks, sometimes months later, when there was nothing left to do."(pg. 179)

He now feels the need to associate with his father's being, a fact that he had shunned most of his adolescent and adult life. He now begins to look for ways to connect with the presence which is now a mere memory.
Ashima has no desire to escape to Calcutta now and be far from the place where her husband made his life, the country in which he died. Gogol cannot go on with Maxine’s relationship any further and they eventually break up and one day Ashima asks Gogol to meet someone called Moushumi Mazoomdar whom he had known as a girl.

She meets Gogol and they get involved romantically and within a year they marry. "He is aware that together he and Moushumi are fulfilling a collective, deep-seated desire - because they're both Bengali, everyone can let their hair down a bit" (pg.225). After the first anniversary of their marriage Moushumi starts having an affair with Dimitri, which eventually leads to the break up of her marriage. It is on a train journey that Gogol finally learns about Moushumi’s affair. "Are you having an affair?" (pg. 282) had sprung out of him almost involuntarily as if he had been prepared for it.

Ashima prepares to leave for India intending to live six months of her life in India and six months in the States. Sonia is going to marry her boyfriend, Ben on Christmas Eve. While searching for his camera, Gogol retrieves the unread book that his father had presented to him on his fourteenth birthday. He turns to the first story, ‘The Overcoat’ by Nikoli Gogol.
The Namesake – Movie

Production Details

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Producers</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Running Time</td>
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Cast

Tabu as Ashima Ganguli
Irrfan Khan as Ashoke Ganguli
Kal Penn as Gogol "Nick" Ganguli
Soham Chatterjee as child Gogol
Sahira Nair as Sonia Ganguli
Jacinda Barrett as Maxine Ratcliffe
Sebastian Roché as Chris
Zuleikha Robinson as Moushumi Mazoomdar
Ruma Guha Thakurta as Ashoke's Mother
Sabyasachi Chakrabarty as Ashima's Father
Supriya Devi as Ashima's Grandmother

The Namesake appears like a silently flowing stream of fresh water that is turbulent at times; at times it confides its beauty only in its free flowing nature that abruptly changes its course at certain times and at others remains silent. Like an undulant stream, this movie has its genesis with a spurt, continues its journey smoothly and finally culminates in the freedom of the soul that comes through self-exploration and like the stream finally merges with the sea.

We will have to give credit to Mira Nair for producing yet another piece of art that is dependant yet independent of its script version. The way Jhumpa Lahiri writes it, in the same way Mira Nair directs it. Both women have artistically carved out two beautiful pieces of art appealing to all five senses at some time or the other. Without doubt the movie moves on slowly but suavely. The focus being not on the pace but on the grace with which every character is shown and eventually carved out. A seemingly simple story of a Bengali couple who settles in The United States and brings up two children who are born in the U.S
itself is not just another portrayal of a diasporic life but a series of self-revelation for every character that follows in a systematic manner is worthy of the applause. The attention has been paid not to the extrinsic but the intrinsic values that are clearly shown in the facial expressions, movement of the eyes, wordless expressions and even a simple hand gesture.

In an interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, Director Nair spoke to Sophia Asare about her new film, The Namesake and admitted that on her first reading of the text the book sort of hit her "like a bolt of lightning". In February 2005, Mira Nair had lost her mother-in-law and had buried her absolutely not prepared to lose her. She read *The Namesake* completely in a state of mourning, and felt a shock of recognition that Jhumpa Lahiri understood exactly what she was going through. "It was like a fever. I had two films I was supposed: to make but I just dropped everything, and nine months after reading the book I was shooting the movie. I haven't worked that fast on anything; I'm like a bulldozer my friends call me." The cast of the movie had been carefully selected by Mira Nair and she involved both Hollywood as well as Bollywood actors to be a part of it.

- Won - Love is Folly International Film Festival (Bulgaria) - "Golden Aphrodite" - Mira Nair
- Nominated - Casting Society of America - "Best Feature Film Casting" - Cindy Tolan
Spreading across two generations, two clashing cultures and two very different ways of living that crash and collide into each other only to become lovingly intertwined, The Namesake is ultimately about the imminently relevant question: what does it mean to be an American family? The storyline that the movie follows is the same as that of what we come across in the novel. The names are retained the characters too retain similar identity. Ashima and Gogol, a Bengali couple take a flight to step into a new world called America. As she travels half the world with her husband who is no more than an acquaintance to her she begins to settle in a new world that is soon to become her own not completely though as she very firmly retains the values of her own culture. Tabu, who plays Ashima’s role was more than suitable for this role, she is seen filling up the screen with her graceful sarees, minimal but very impressive dialogues and more than anything else, her expressions leave us spellbound. Irfan Khan plays the role of Ashoke Ganguly with the same magnificence with which the director directs it. While going through the novel if we were to visualize Ashoke, Irfan Khan would instantly fill the frame. He completes his research at MIT and eventually settles for his job. Planes and trains and occasionally cars and rickshaws take us across both India and
America, reminding us that each are vast and continually foreign landscapes on which we, and The Namesake’s characters, are merely small players this is Nair’s fort who has a habit of making movies about small and ordinary stories and articulating them in vast, cinematic language.

The couple is blessed with a son who was hurriedly named Gogol for the reason that he happened to be Ashoke’s favourite author and because in some way he owes his life to Gogol because it was his book that saved him after meeting with a train accident. Life is not as easy for Gogol as his parents might wish. As a first-generation American teenager, Gogol (Kal Penn) must learn to tread a razor-thin line between his Bengali roots and his American birthright in the search for his own identity. He grows up to be an ABCD (American born confused desi) and unaware and unable to strike a balance between the two cultures that he is a part of, Gogol attempts to forge his destiny - rejecting his given name, dating a rich American girl (Jacinda Barrett), heading to study architecture at Yale. His parents cling to their Bengali traditions. The insistent
Westernization of Gogol and his sister lead a resigned Ashima to shake her head and declare "Sometimes when I close my eyes and listen to you, I feel like I have given birth to strangers."

But their paths keep crossing with both comic and painfully revelatory consequences. Until Gogol begins to see the links between the world his parents left behind and the new world that lies in front of him. His initial immaturity highlights the parent-child conflict or the conflict between two generations and enables the viewer to know even more about him. His journey to reconnect with his Indian-ness begins after he learns from his father the reason behind naming him with such an unusual name. Eventually after his father’s demise he begins to understand the struggles of his parents more vividly and the images of the past that he once detested now become a part of his quest for self. In the end, Asima (Tabu) delivers one of the most inspirational speeches in movie history, and we witness a superb dramatic performance come full circle. The movie therefore comes out to be a brilliant one, a masterpiece that remains faithful to its text yet maintains its wonderful individual identity.

Which is better- 'the book or its adaptation into a movie'? Ask any reader who has seen the movie version of a favourite novel, and the answer will usually be: "The book was better." That's because readers of a novel have already made their own perfect movie version. They have visualized it, fleshed out the
locations and set the pace as they either flipped through the book or savoured every word. So it becomes not only important but also interesting to see how a writer’s creation has been dealt with the director’s camera. In this process of comparing and contrasting we come out with a few findings that are noted below to see the difference in the impact that is caused by a book and then the movie.

**Script v/s Screen**

In an interview with Arthur J Pais Managing Editor ‘Features’, to those who faithfully read Jhumpa’s novel and were about to see the film her message was loud and clear –“My novel encompasses 30 years in the life of a family, and what Mira has made is a 110 – minute- long film. You cannot have everything from a novel into a film unless it is a television serial. Books are earthbound entities, and we read them whenever we have time. A film, on the other hand, seems more ethereal, and should be able to hold our attention from start to finish. The essence of my book remains very much in the film but it inhabits a different realm”

The first word of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* isn’t a word at all. It is a date 1968, to be exact. But in many ways it is fitting that the opening line of Lahiri’s captivating novel takes the reader back in time, for much of the story is an examination of the tension between past and present and it is this tension that we are never far away from and this flux between the two is a consistent
developer of its theme throughout the novel. Invariably, as the name suggests, the novel deals with a name, a name that defines your identity, colors your existence, shapes your beliefs and also shapes the lives of an individual. Jhumpa Lahiri in one of her interviews talks about the importance of names and ‘Gogol’ in particular.

“I can't speak for all Bengalis. But all the Bengalis I know personally, especially those living in India, have two names, one public, and one private. It's always fascinated me. My parents are called by different names depending on what country they happen to be in; in India they're known by their pet names, but in America they're known by their good names. My sister, who was born and raised in America, has two names. I'm like Gogol in that my pet name inadvertently became my good name. I have two other names on my passport and my birth certificate (my mother couldn't settle on just one). But when I was enrolled in school the teachers decided that Jhumpa was the easiest of my names to pronounce and that was that. To this day many of my relatives think that it's both odd and inappropriate that I'm known as Jhumpa in an official, public context”.

It is thus that we realize the importance of a name in the novel, Gogol who loves his name till elementary level, hates it by the time he reaches college, changes it to Nikhil and eventually Nick. He is at all the points trying desperately to relate his existence with his name which never seems to be
happening. Though the father has his own reasons to name his son so, Gogol in his growing years was never able to realize the connection. Instead he hated his own name for its not-so-American existence. The constant nagging of friends at school also made him realize so. Starting from changing his name, to living much away from his parents on his own, having frequent affairs as well as break-ups with a number of girlfriends, Gogol did it all; only to be shocked at an unexpected turn of events which makes him realize everything he chose to ignore in order to be accepted in his western world and in his own mind.

"Not only does Gogol Ganguli have a pet name turned good name, but a last name turned first name. And so it occurs to him that no one he knows in the world; in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake." (pg 78) Gogol decides to set off on the journey of his life once again but this time, with far more wisdom and practicality and closer to his roots. Those of us with multiple names grapple with many similar issues of identity. Jhumpa Lahiri therefore brings about with clarity the theme of existence, the quest for self, the feeling of living in an alien land as for Ashima and Ashoke and the feeling of being born in an alien land for Gogol and Sonia and that too with a constant confusion because of the two conflicting cultures that you are a part of. One that you have inherited and the other one in which you live in.
Taking a step forward when we try to find out the same justification of the theme in the movie that we have in the novel and in the end we come out quite convinced as Karl Penn seems to be doing justice to his name Gogol. In terms of the significance of the title, the movie has been justified as well, from the very beginning till the very end. The focus remains on the name, what is there in a name, why is the name there at all, the symbolic meaning of the name and the beautiful implication of the meaning of the name. Gogol Ganguly was the name bestowed on a little child who was just a few hours old. Very carefully thought of by Ashoke Ganguly (Irfan Khan) and very readily agreed upon by Ashima Ganguly (Tabu). The meaning of this name is revealed slowly throughout the movie connecting it with symbolic instances related to his life. As a line written on a book reads “From the man who gave you your name to the man who gave you his” (Pg 288) A book by Nikoli Gogol a Russian writer who had his inspiration on Ashoke Ganguly’s life.

Karl Penn, who has played the role of Gogol has not only done justice to the role but created a long lasting impression by the expressions that he gives with his eyes. He has beautifully depicted Gogol’s search for identity through his series of love affairs and a conflict between American and Indian values. The Namesake thus symbolically shows the importance of his name and the effect that a name has. It is not only Gogol but also Ashima whose name means freedom, who lives up to her name towards the end as she achieves a freedom of her mind and soul both. Apart from the existential quest that Gogol, Ashima
or even Ashoke faces throughout the novel we find that the novel is not only a
text about Gogol but more importantly it is also a text that redefines feminism
through Ashima and Moushmi. Sonia though is a minor female character, a
rather typical American.

Ashima, whom Ashoke’s parents have arranged for him to marry, initially
mourns the life she has left behind. Yet, for her, too, her born-in-the-USA
baby, Gogol, represents the new life she will build in her adopted home, the
new roots she will plant and cultivate in America even as her old roots in
Calcutta begin to wither and die. Although at first Ashima feels ready to raise a
family in this brave new world, once she actually becomes a mother she
discovers that she feels quite differently. "I'm saying I don't want to raise Gogol
alone in this country. It is not right. I want to go back." (pg 33)

Writing in the long form, Lahiri is able to do what she couldn't in her Short
Stories: follow her characters beyond one pivotal moment in their lives and
track their development and growth. Ashima’s love of family, for instance,
influences her to create a close-knit web of immigrant friends. This group
practices Indian customs, speaks the Bengali language, and, in many respects,
becomes a substitute family for the vast collection of relatives back in India.
But for Ashima, the close relations between the immigrants become an excuse
to avoid the customs of American life. Ashima is reluctant to learn to drive, she
insists on wearing Indian clothing and eating Indian food, and for many years
she lives without American friends. To a large degree, her life is consumed by recreating Indian culture in America. Lahiri skillfully blends events of the past into events of the present by writing the scenes with vivid present-tense verbs. On such occasions, the effortless blending of tenses reminds readers that Gogol's past was once his present. In this way, Lahiri does not simply describe events, she allows readers to live the moments along with her characters as the past becomes present – the present, past.

Lahiri unwittingly draws out the concept of trans-national feminism. Transnational Feminism is a contemporary paradigm. The name highlights the difference between International and Trans National conceptions of feminism and favours the latter. As a feminist approach, it can be said that trans-national feminism is generally attentive to intersections among nationhood, race, gender, sexuality and economic exploitation on a world scale, in the context of emergent global capitalism. Trans national feminists inquire in to the social, political and economic conditions comprising imperialism, their connections to colonialism and nationalism; the role of gender, the state, race, class, and sexuality in the organization of resistance to hegemonies in the making and unmaking of nation and nation-state Transnational feminist practice is attentive to feminism as both a liberatory formation and one with longstanding ties to colonialism, racism and imperialism. As such, it resists utopic ideas about 'global sisterhood' while simultaneously working to lay the groundwork for
more productive and equitable social relations among women across borders and cultural contexts.\textsuperscript{12}

Watching Tabu perform in the movie so powerfully and gracefully we are more than convinced that the movie that comes from a lady (Mira Nair) does justice to the role of another lady Tabu. This movie is about characters and not places, without doubt there is a beauty in which Jhumpa Lahiri carves out every character that we can start visualizing towards the end and also retain them in our minds. This of course is a very tough job because one has to tease the imagination power of the reader only with the power of words and nothing else to add to it. This is the sole challenge of a writer. A director on the other hand has the upper hand because she can select from a variety of characters make them to act and fit the role. Here Mira Nair’s expertise comes forth. She did not select her characters from the main league of Bollywood actors who add glamour to a script. Instead with her finer sensibility she picked up characters that seem to have been in their respective roles for years. Tabu, a Bollywood actor who played the leading female protagonist Ashima has been a key driver in the movie. The ease with which she turns into a Bengali daughter, then a wife and then a mother living abroad is commendable. Her Bengali accent and Indianized English have held true to the cultural Bengali spirit of the movie. She has her role in almost all the scenes in the movie and in every scene she leaves a beautiful mark on the viewers mind exactly like it does in the novel. Tabu is not just another Bollywood actor but a fine artist and a perfectionist
like Aamir Khan. She speaks with her eyes, movement of her hands, blankness of her face and the cracks between her lips. Gracefully clad in her Bengali sarees she has revealed a wonderful world of her own. You cannot figure out as to which scene was her best scene because in every shot she comes up with a perfect shot. Right from the beginning, Ashima has been shown as a learned, simple, optimistic, cultured and an adaptable lady. Where in one scene she fears rising up her children in America because of the different value system, on the other hand she seems optimistic about leaving her native country with a man whom she would marry. In various scenes she is shown making her world complete by involving herself with her husband’s chores or her children’s studies or maybe her reading English literature.

She is shown as a pivot point around which every other characters life is revolving. She is deeply attached to her family, her loving husband, children and her family back in India but she never imposes her possessiveness on any of them. Even when she finds that her son, instead of living with her while his father is away is going on a vacation with his girlfriend’s family she adjusts to it without being rebellious. Though her expectations from her children are based completely on the Indian values, she never imposes them on anyone even if she may not be very comfortable with them. An instance is seen where Gogol’s girlfriend comes home and addresses to her as Ashima and as Ashoke to his father. She does feel the awkwardness but does not disapprove of it at any point. Her role has been instrumental in letting the meaning of the story
come out. As she stands like a symbolic comparison between the Indian and Western value system, she makes it sharper and clear for the audience to draw out the comparison that was one of the motifs of the director.

Another powerful feminine character is seen in Moushumi Mazundar (Zuleikha Robinson), a second generation Bengali like Gogol, who has embraced the western way of life as keenly as he has. Their parents had hoped on their marriage, but neither of them was interested at that moment. She had other secret plans, and he found her ugly, meek, and too obedient of her family's wishes. Now she's become a businesswoman and has seen the world on her own. Without her glasses, with a modern hairstyle and western clothes, she looks desirable. In the novel too we find that she has a streak of independence attached to her, she refuses to change her surname after wedding and feels that Majumdar in itself is enough to define her identity. But right through their married life Moushumi continues to assert her capabilities to still be independent in many different ways. Be it her secret application for an advanced course at the University at Paris, her ability to merge in the multitude of the people thronging the streets of Paris or going for a walk by herself.

"Sometimes she would sit at a restaurant alone, at the bar, ordering sushi or a sandwich and a glass of wine, simply to remind her self that she was still capable of being on her own. This assurance is important to her; along with the
Sanskrit vows she'd repeated at her wedding, she'd privately vowed that she'd never grow fully dependent on her husband as her mother has." (pg. 247)

"Only she is not Mrs. Ganguli Moushumi has kept her last name. She doesn't adopt Ganguli, not even with a hyphen. Her own last name Mazoomdar is already a mouthful. With a hyphenated surname, she would no longer fit into the window of a business envelope though he hasn't admitted this to her, he'd hoped, the day they filled out the application for their marriage license, that she might consider it otherwise, as a tribute to her father if nothing else. But the thought of changing her last name to Ganguli has never crossed Moushumi's mind. When relatives from India continue to address letters and cards to 'Mrs. Moushumi Ganguli' she will shake her head and sigh." (pg 227)

We can consider this gesture of hers to be assertive of a feministic approach. Even after she gets into an affair outside marriage; she calmly and honestly answers to her husband’s question and accepts it. Without much hue and cry they separate.
However, she likes to socialize much more than him, and he doesn't quite fit in well in her intellectual set of friends. The last drop is Moushumi's affair with a French ex-boyfriend of hers. Gogol finally learns to make peace with his culture and his circumstances. He and Moushumi acknowledge that no one is perfect and to depart from each other. Moushumi Mazundar (Zuleikha Robinson) plays a small but a powerful role in defining the feminist approach that both the writer and the director like to depict and she also serves as a link in Gogol's search for his identity.

Family ties, bonding between siblings, Sonia and Gogol, complexities of human emotions, relationships and its facets, friends and their importance in Ashima's life. All these little themes add beauty to the slow moving pace of the novel. Lahiri's focus is not on places it is on people and through the diversity in places we discover the beauty in people. In the movie though, we find that not all the people or relationships are carved out with the same beauty as in the novel. Sonia and Gogol share a bond between a sister and a brother and a good one but in the movie Sonia seems to be a passive rather a character that disappears from the frame and comes in abruptly and nowhere in the film have we found her giving any substantial support to her brother or even mother for that matter. She has fewer dialogues and stands merely as a symbol for ABCD's and towards the end is shown as settling down with her boyfriend rather than doing anything substantial for her own identity.
Flipping through the text of *The Namesake*, one discovers a lot of little insights and plot developments that the movie, by necessity left out. The book, of course, has the benefit of detail and eloquence. The movie on the other hand is faithful to the book, retaining the most important plot points and some of the details that made the book so memorable. For the ones who have read the 291 pages of the book would not be disappointed if not exuberant about the movie that runs for 122 minutes. The adapted screenplay did about as good a job as it could have. In terms of the narrative technique we find ourselves oscillating between the past and the present and yet we never lose track of what is happening. The movie on the other hand does not utilize this technique. As a result the novel comes out to be individual centric, with its focus on Gogol whereas the focus of the movie is on the immigrant couple and the troubles that they face. The reason for the above may be that Lahiri is a second generation immigrant and Nair is a first generation immigrant.

The plot structure of the book is definitely far superior to the movie. In the course of Lahiri’s narration, one incident leads to another. In the final analysis, this contributes to the greater impact of the book. Yet, it is also true that the finest element of the movie lies in the performance of Irrfan Khan and Tabu. The characters created by Lahiri grow, and each time one gets absorbed in thinking about how a particular line was rendered in the film. The most powerful scene in the book is the one in which we find Gogol sitting alone in his father’s apartment after his death, this scene misses from the movie but we
find on the other hand a heart moving scene in which Karl Penn (Gogol) sees his mother at the airport with his shaven head. This scene cannot be felt with the same intensity in the book as in the movie because of the movie’s visual appeal that cannot be felt in the book. The camera movement in the movie is slower when it concentrates on the characters rather than on places. We have a number of long and short shots perfectly placed in every place and location deriving the best out of Director’s work.

The greatness of Lahiri’s *The Namesake* lies in its detailing and the abundant food for thought that she leaves her readers with. Nair is unable to match this in the movie. We would not be doing justice if we were to say that the novel that we read is all in all a masterpiece and the movie is nowhere close to it. The book does lose some of its momentum after Ashoke’s death, we also find The Gogol – Moushumi relationship is particularly insipid in the end too we find the life of the main character still incomplete, we get an impression as if he has left many things untold, although we do find a transition in him from beginning till the end. “Lahiri was moved by seeing her work on the big screen:” I was bring with curiosity as we were going to see the movie. I had no idea what to expect. I had seen shots and stills so I had a sense. But to see it, I was just overwhelmed and had a very emotional reaction. I didn’t cry when I watched it. I cried afterward.” The book is well written, clear, and evocative and brings out the conflict between the eastern and western cultures with brilliance and simplicity.
The movie remains faithful to its text except that it has been compressed in length. At certain points we find that Nair diverges from it. We read in the book that Gogol goes to spend days with his girl friend Maxine and tries to move away from his Indian parents but in the movie there is no detail given about him staying away for days together and also his break up is shown in a casual manner and abruptly while in the book detailed version of Maxine’s dislike of his Indianness is highlighted, it is not Nick this time but Gogol who breaks up with her. Also we find that Maushmi’s relationship and her marriage break up too are treated in a casual manner in the film and the profoundness with which it is shown in the novel is missing from the film.

Sooni Taraporevala’s script sticks pretty much to the spirit of the book even while it is not entirely faithful to it. In the book Ashoke (Irrfan) leaves Calcutta with new bride Ashimla (Tabu) to make Boston his home. In the film, he sets base in New York. Ashima is made a singer, which only helps in adding to the great range in Nitin Sawhney’s background score – Rabindra Sangeet to hip hop to a delightful remix of Mukesh’s ‘Yeh mera deewanapan hai ya mohabat ka suroor’. Many scenes are not in the book. Similarly, the film does away with a lot of languid detailing which makes the narration seem crammed. The film stops just a little short of the overwhelming emotional impact of the book, it stirs you though not as deeply.
Karl Penn is in fine form as Gogol, caught between two cultures, saddled with a name from a third. Tabu and Irrfan together are a little awkward, halting and held back, which works well in the context of the characters they play initially unsure of themselves in an alien land, a land in which they grow to love each other and share happiness and disappointments. There are bound to be quibbles about whether they get their Bengali right or whether Nair captures the culture and ethos. But it still can’t take much away from this humane, warm and elegantly crafted film.

These days with digital music recording, adding new songs to movies is becoming easier. Mira Nair used Nitin Sawhney’s music in The Namesake to show all kinds of emotions. In the movie, Ashima’s romantic setting is enhanced by an appropriate love song. Similarly a pre-existing, hit song can help create the mood required in the movie and Mira Nair’s use of the popular number ‘Yeh mera diwana pan hai’ aptly to justify the situation where the exuberant newlywed Moushumi performs a jazz to the melodies of a song so fondly etched in our memories in the immortal voice of Mukesh. In fact the whole setting fits so well in keeping with the mood of the moment in the movie. Even if the movie does not use songs every other minute, it has shown action with a background score playing regularly.

A review by Waqar in this is yet another teary installation in the growing collection of books about and by the Indian diaspora, each of which competes
with the others in the portrayal of the romantic nostalgia the main characters (Indians settled in the West) invariably feel towards their forsaken homeland, the clash of cultures they experience as they try to build a life in the West, and the inevitable dreariness of this life spent seemingly by necessity, not choice, in a land and culture that remain permanently foreign as the heart and mind continue to live in the abandoned homeland.16

Jhumpa Lahiri’s much praised 2003 bestseller was a gravely charming, closely observed saga of one immigrant Bengali family in America, with the focus on the American born son and his search for identity. Director Mira Nair has taken the story and merged it with her own lush sensibilities and concerns. The result is a lovely companion piece to Nair’s 2001 art house hit Monsoon Wedding more scattered but with a gathering profundity that lingers long after the lights come up. What do we bring to America when we come from other places, as almost all of us originally do? What do we give away in order to fit in? Can we get it back if we want, or does it change in the journey of assimilating? These are the questions “The Namesake” asks, and as vast as they are, Nair finds her answers in the smallest details of living.”17
NOTES AND REFERENCES


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17. http://www.boston.com/movies/display?display=movie&id=9182